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ABSTRACT

With limited exceptions, existing research has focused on either intrafamily violence or crime and violence outside the family. This study examined the proportion of men who only offend extrafamilially, the proportion of men who are violent only towards their wives, and the proportion of men who are violent in both spheres. Unincarcerated males (N=2,291) were interviewed over the telephone regarding any violence towards their wives and any violent behavior toward individuals who were not in the family. Subjects, a subsample of the 1985 National Family Violence Survey respondents, were comprised of those men who were currently or recently living with a spouse or female partner, and had responded to a series of questions designed to assess the existence or absence of assaultive behavior. Results indicated that 15% of the men in this sample had engaged in some form of violent behavior over the past year. The majority of violent males specialized in their choice of victims; that is, they chose to assault only family or non-family members, but not both. Only 10% of the violent males reported assaulting both family and non-family individuals; 75% of the violent men admitted assaulting their wives within the previous year; and 33% admitted to non-family assault. (BHK)

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VB52

# Interrelationship of Family and Extrafamilial Violence in a Representative Sample

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## Abstract

The current survey of 2,291 males (nationally representative) questioned respondents about their violence towards their wives and their violent behavior toward individuals who were not in their family. The resulting data suggested that the vast majority of violent males specialized in their choice of victims; that is, they chose to assault only family or non-family members, but not both. Only 10% of the violent males reported assaulting both family and non-family individuals. Different theoretical perspectives are discussed, most notably those which predict a high proportion of violence across many different situations and those which predict that violence would be more related to specific situational factors. Finally, it was noted that a much higher proportion of non-family assaulters (versus family assaulters) were violent across both spheres, suggesting that the learning of social restraint may interact with personal propensities towards violence to produce violent behavior.

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## Interrelationship of Family and Extrafamilial Violence in a Representative Sample

With some limited exceptions, existing research on violent and aggressive behavior has focused on either intrafamily violence or crime and violence outside the family. Hotaling, Straus, and Lincoln (1989) point out that while sociologists frequently study violence within the family, crime and violence outside the family are typically examined by criminologists. As an example, the 1975 National Family Violence Survey questioned respondents extensively about family violence but did not utilize even one item to assess crime and violence outside the family (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Similarly, Bortich and Hagan (1990) conducted a detailed study of an entire century of crime in Toronto, Canada, in which they utilized official statistics which were essentially purged of domestic violence.

A few studies have compared the arrest rate for non-family violence between wife batterers and nonviolent husbands (e.g., Graff, 1979; Straus, 1985), and have found that batterers are significantly more likely to be violent toward non-family persons. The proportion of wife-beaters who have histories of other antisocial behaviors ranges from 12% in one study (Faulk, 1974) to 92% in another (Browne, 1984), with several estimates in between (Fagan, Stewart, & Hansen, 1983; Flynn, 1977; Gayford, 1975; Rounsaville, 1978; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Walker, 1979). Some of these studies are of limited generalizability due to the samples selected for study (e.g., utilization of clinical

populations of battered women or only unbroken families with a child in college). In addition, these studies did not necessarily measure *violent* behavior per se, and if they did, failed to address the opposite question: what proportion of men who have assaulted non-family victims also assault their wives?

This paper will examine, in a representative sample of unincarcerated American males, the proportion of men who *only* offend extrafamilially (hereafter referred to as "non-family offenders"), the proportion of men who are violent *only* towards their wives (hereafter referred to as "family offenders"), and the proportion of men who are violent in *both* spheres ("pan-violent" individuals).

The Psychiatric model and the Social Learning model are two major perspectives on the etiology of violent behavior which predict very different patterns of violent behavior among a sample such as the one examined here. This paper will *not* report the results of an empirical examination of the differential etiological validity of these two perspectives; rather, these two perspectives are presented because they suggest very different patterns of the incidence of family and non-family violence. The following paragraphs will briefly examine the Psychiatric and Social Learning Models for their respective predictions about the incidence patterns of violent behavior within the family, outside of the family, and in both spheres.

*The Psychiatric Model of Violent Behavior*

This etiological perspective emphasizes the individual characteristics which distinguish violent from nonviolent individuals. Individual characteristics which studies have consistently found to differ between violent and nonviolent individuals include neuropsychological functioning (e.g., Spellacy, 1977, 1978), the hostile interpretation of ambiguous events (e.g., Dodge, 1980; Waas, 1988), medical history (e.g., Lewis, Shanok, & Balla, 1979), and indicators of prenatal biological environment (e.g., Kandel, Brennan, & Mednick, 1989), among others.

The Psychiatric Model suggests that individual propensities for aggressive behavior vary greatly and that violent behavior is more the result of the strength of these propensities than of current situational factors. It is true that many studies have found that individual differences frequently distinguish between violent and nonviolent subjects. While much of this evidence is gleaned from cross-sectional or retrospective studies, prospective studies have also been supportive of this model (e.g., Werner & Smith, 1982; Kandel, Brennan, & Mednick, 1989). This perspective suggests that individuals with a strong tendency towards violent behavior should demonstrate that behavior across a wide variety of situations (e.g., both intra- and extrafamilially).

*Social Learning Theory*

In contrast, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1973) states that behavior is learned and applied in situations where it is taught and reinforced. This perspective suggests that violence may be more strongly related to situational characteristics then to individual propensities.

Some of Bandura's work (e.g., 1971, 1973) has demonstrated that the probability of aggressive behavior increases when a potential target of aggression is similar to a previously-observed target of a model's aggression. In another laboratory experiment involving victim characteristics, Berkowitz and Geen (1967) found more frequent aggression against a target which bore a name similar to a modelled target's name. In developing his theory of differential association-reinforcement of violent behavior, Akers (1985) suggests that aggressive behavior is learned through social and nonsocial reinforcement, and that violent behavior is only likely to occur in situations where it has been reinforced. Importantly, observational learning can introduce and reinforce either the use of aggression or the inhibition of it; such learning is especially potent when an individual observes a model with whom they identify (Neapolitan, 1981; Huesmann, Lagerspetz, & Eron, 1984).

The likelihood of learning violence in multiple spheres is probably lower than the likelihood of observational learning occuring in only one sphere; thus, Social Learning Theory would predict that the majority of violent offenders will offend in one

sphere or another, but not in both.

*Hypotheses*

In this study we propose to examine how well the data on choice of victim and breadth of violent behavior fit the incidence predictions of these two very different models of aggressive behavior. The Psychiatric Model predicts that because violent behavior is more dependent upon the characteristics of the individual rather than of the situation, violent individuals will choose their victims across situations (both from within their family and outside of it). In contrast, the Social Learning Model predicts that individuals will only behave violently in situations where violence has been taught and reinforced; therefore, it seems likely that a majority of individuals will be violent only in one sphere or another, but not in both. Again, the data presented in the following sections is not intended to compare the etiological validity of these perspectives, but rather to test different predictions of incidence patterns.

## Method

*Sample*

This study utilizes an existing data base known as the 1985 National Family Violence Survey, which was collected from a national probability sample of 6,002 households (Straus and Gelles, 1990). For each household, the interview was conducted

by telephone, lasting an average of 35 minutes. To qualify for inclusion in the Survey, households had to include adults eighteen years of age or older who were: (1) presently married or living as a male-female couple; (2) divorced or separated within the last two years; or (3) a single parent with a child under eighteen years of age living in the household. Random digit dialing sampling methods were employed. The response rate of completed eligible households was 84%. A more detailed explanation of the sample is given in Straus and Gelles (1990).

The current subsample studied comprises the 2,291 men who (a) confirmed that they were currently or recently living with a spouse or female partner and (b) responded to a series of questions designed to assess the existence or absence of assaultive behavior (both within their marriage and with non-family individuals). Only men were examined in this sample because males are disproportionately responsible for violent crime outside the family (Bartol & Bartol, 1986).

*Assaultive Behavior within the Marriage*

For the purposes of this study, violence is defined as "the use of physical force or restraint carried out with the intent of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). Assaultive behavior within the marriage was assessed as part of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (discussed in detail in Straus & Gelles, 1990). The CTS has been utilized in many studies and in both the 1975 and 1985 National Family

Violence Survey. One index on the CTS assesses the level of husband-to-wife violence within the marriage, ranging from more minor violence (such as pushing or shoving) to major assaults (e.g., punching with a closed fist).

*Violent Assault on Individuals Outside the Family*

Assaultive behavior toward individuals who were not in the subject's family was assessed by the following items: "In the last twelve months, have you gotten into a fight with and hit a person outside your family?" and "In the last twelve months, have you gotten into a fight with and hit and injured a person outside your family?" Individuals who responded positively to either item were considered to be extrafamilially assaultive; those who responded negatively to both items were not considered to be extrafamilially assaultive.

*Sample Characteristics*

All members of the sample utilized for this study had age, race, and employment information assessed as part of the survey. Seventy-one percent of the respondents were white; 11.4% were black, 9.6% were Hispanic, and the remaining 1.8% were "other" (e.g., Pacific Islanders). Half of the sample (49.9%) were blue collar workers, or farm workers with a high school education or less; the remaining 50.1% of the respondents were white collar workers, or farm workers, owners, or managers who had more than a high school education. The ages of the men sampled range from 18

years to 90 years old, with a mean age of 42.923 (SD = 14.53).

Finally, 2,166 out of 2,291 (95%) of the men interviewed were married or cohabitating with a female. Another 5% were divorced or separated, and another half a percent were widowed, all in the last two years. Thus, this sample is largely compromised of currently married or cohabitating men.

## Results

### *Rates of violent behavior and their overlap*

Fifteen percent of the men in this sample (N=311) had engaged in some type of violent behavior over the past year: they admitted assaulting either a spouse, a non-family victim, or both. Figure 1 presents the distribution of assault on family versus non-family victims among all these violent males.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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### *Family Offenders*

Three-quarters of the 311 violent men (N=240) admitted assaulting their wives within the previous year. Of these 240 men who battered their wives, 13% of them (N=32) *also* assaulted non-family individuals (that is, they were pan-violent). The majority (87%) of the 240 family offenders assaulted only within the family.

*Non-family Offenders*

Of the sample of 311 violent men, 33% (N=103) admitted to extrafamilial assault. Of these 103 non-family offenders, 31.5% (N=32) were pan-violent (i.e., they *also* assaulted their wives). More than two-thirds of the non-family offenders only assaulted extrafamilial victims. However, in this sample, a higher proportion of non-family offenders were pan-violent (31.5%), compared to family offenders (13%).

*Pan-Violent Offenders*

Thirty-two men (10% of the violent men, or 1.5% of the entire sample) admitted committing *both* husband-to-wife violence and extrafamilial violence. The remaining 90% (N=279) of the violent men in this sample were violent *either* intra- *or* extrafamilially, but not in both spheres. Thus, there appears to be significant specialization in the choice of victim among violent males in this sample. Only a small minority of males offended both inside and outside of the home.

*Violent and nonviolent males and their characteristics*

The four groups of males (family offenders, non-family offenders, pan-violent males, and nonviolent males) were compared across several demographic variables: age, race (white versus non-white), and a measure of socioeconomic status (white-collar versus blue-collar employment). Table 1 compares the four groups on their range of ages and mean ages. It is obvious from this

Table that the violent men were much younger than the nonviolent men; however, the variation between the violent groups is not large.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Table 2 compares the four groups of males on race. This Table reveals that the pan-violent males had a much higher proportion of non-white men than the other three groups (51.5%); in addition, the nonviolent group had the highest proportion of white males (72.5%). The family offenders and non-family offenders did not differ significantly from each other.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Table 3 presents a comparison between the four groups on proportion of males who worked at blue-collar versus white-collar jobs. Here, the subjects seem divided into two major groups: the family offenders and nonviolent males, who were both divided almost equally between white- and blue-collar jobs, and the pan-violent and non-family offenders, who were disproportionately blue-collar (71% and 76.9%, respectively).

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Insert Table 3 about here

## Discussion

This nationwide study of American males noted that only a small proportion of self-reported violent males were violent both within their families and toward extrafamily individuals. Most violent males assaulted either their wives or extrafamilial victims, but not both.

This study has several strengths, primary among them a subsample of more than two thousand men drawn from a nationally representative survey. Other research has utilized clinical samples from battered women's shelters (e.g., Fagan, Stewart, & Hansen, 1983; Flynn, 1977; Gayford, 1975; Rounsaville, 1978; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Walker, 1979), which probably limits generalizability to the most severe cases or to those cases in which victims of family assault are willing to seek help. Indeed, estimates of pan-violence from clinical samples are predictably higher than the current (nationally representative) sample. The nature of this sample suggests that pan-violence may be less common (at least among some groups) than more limited research has previously suggested.

Another strength of this study is the fact that it surpasses the typical use of official statistics for the study of violent behavior. Several reviews have confirmed the reliability and validity of the use of self-report for research on antisocial

behavior (Singh, 1979; Huizinga & Elliott, 1986). The use of confidential self-report to measure of family violence is more preferable than the use of official statistics, since such statistics may often omit family assaults (Gelles, 1985). For example, it has been estimated that only 6.7% of all husband-to-wife assaults are reported to the police (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1990). However, it is true that the self-report method has weaknesses; most notably, respondents reluctant to disclose antisocial behavior may have been counted among the nonviolent respondents. Further, all self-report measures are subject to memory errors (the CTS inquires about the preceding 12 months, which is probably too long a period for accurate recall) (Straus, 1990). Nevertheless, until both cultural norms and the justice system recognize the criminal nature of assaults on family members, self-report may be the only valid method for assessing family violence.

Given the self-report nature of the CTS, investigators have studied its validity. Bulcroft and Straus (1975) have found evidence for good concurrent validity on the CTS items which assess violence and aggression. In addition, the construct validity of the scale seems evident from a number of studies (reviewed in Straus, 1990). The measures of aggression and violence are also highly reliable (Straus, 1990). These studies help support the use of self-report data (such as the CTS) for studies on violent behavior.

The measure of violence in this survey is, however, limited

to assault. Therefore, it is possible that a subject who has denied assault might be guilty of another violent crime. Such a subject would be characterized in this study as "nonviolent." However, the current study is not the first to utilize assault as a measure of violence. Assault compromises such a large proportion of violent offenses (Uniform Crime Report, 1989) that previous studies have also used it as a measure of violent crime (e.g., Shepherd, Pierce, Scully & Leslie, 1987). Therefore, the magnitude of this problem, if existent, is in all likelihood not very large.

Finally, two points suggest that this study is probably most generalizable to the many violent individuals whose crimes are not sufficiently salient or serious enough to warrant incarceration. First, this sample only includes individuals who were prosocial enough to cooperative with a survey. To date, no research can conclusively state that violent individuals are less willing than nonviolent individuals to cooperate with endeavors such as anonymous interviews; however, it seems likely that very antisocial individuals would refuse to cooperate. Second, the sample is limited to those individuals who were not incarcerated. This could be the case for a number of reasons: these men may be at an early stage in their careers, they may be "between" incarcerations, they may have somehow avoided detection for a long time, or, most probably, they behave violently in ways that are not considered sufficiently severe to merit incarceration. The 1985 Survey does not, unfortunately, include information on

the men's police record and/or previous incarcerations. This exclusion of incarcerated men probably resulted in the exclusion of the most severely violent individuals. Thus, results here are probably most appropriate for generalization to those violent individuals who are not among the most severe and recidivistic violent criminals.

*Findings*

The most intriguing finding of this study noted that only 10% of the violent men (1.5% of the entire sample) were violent towards *both* wives and non-family individuals. Thus, specialization in victims (single-sphere violence) in this sample is much more common than indiscriminate violence. The most plausible interpretation of this finding relies on the fact that the sample is representative of unincarcerated American males, and states that the observed specialization in choice of victims reflects the true state of affairs among unincarcerated yet violent men. The fact that researchers tend to study family violence and stranger violence separately, therefore, may be less misguided than some have previously thought (e.g., Hotaling, Straus, & Lincoln, 1989).

This interpretation may be weakened somewhat by the nature of the sample; because only men involved in relationships two or fewer years ago were sampled, men whose partnerships dissolved more than two years ago because of violence were selected out. Because a higher rate of violence is found in divorced, versus

married, couples, this selection may have excluded a group in whom a relatively higher proportion of family offenders could be found. However, since men who had been divorced as long as two years prior to the survey *were* included, it seems unlikely that a great many violent men would have been excluded; nevertheless, only 5% of the sampled men were not currently married or cohabitating, and it remains possible that the sample is not representative of divorced men.

Another pertinent observation notes that only violent behavior during the previous 12 months was assessed; perhaps a number of truly pan-violent men were categorized as only family or only non-family offenders because they do not assault frequently enough to have assaulted both wives and extrafamily individuals within one 12-month period. This may have resulted in an underestimation of the size of the pan-violent group. Unfortunately, the survey did not investigate violent behavior beyond this 12-month period for family and non-family assaults; in any case, because such a large majority of men "specialized", in seems probable that even if the proportion is smaller than that estimated here, "specializers" remain in the majority.

If it is true that only a small minority of men offend pan-violently, this finding places violent behavior more easily within the framework of Social Learning Theory than within Psychiatric Theory, which would predict that a majority of violent men offend pan-violently. The observation that violence is usually confined to specific situations (presumably those in

which violence was learned and reinforced) is more consistent with Social Learning Theory. However, some individuals were pan-violent. This finding might suggest that these individuals learned violence across several situations, or that they are subject to other etiological pressures (possibly those emphasized by the Psychiatric model). The wide variety of violent behavior observed in human beings, and the lack of a direct relationship between such behavior and any one causal factor, strongly supports the probability that different etiological equations are relevant for different types of offenders. Further, the plethora of research supporting the Psychiatric Model (e.g., Spellacy, 1977, 1978; Lewis, Shanok, & Balla, 1979; Dodge, 1980; Werner & Smith, 1982; Waas, 1988; Kandel, Brennan, & Mednick, 1989) makes it probable that characterological factors are operative in at least some violent individuals--perhaps in the minority who are pan-violent. In support of this, some research has demonstrated that biological factors are most strongly associated with violence in *recidivistically* violent individuals (Kandel, Brennan, & Mednick, 1989).

Social Learning Theory explains the finding of predominantly single-sphere violence by noting that these men were only violent in situations where violence was taught and reinforced (or, conversely, that they were only nonviolent in situations where restraint was taught and reinforced). One interesting question is whether the findings here support a social learning perspective which emphasizes the learning of aggression, or one

which emphasizes the learning of restraint of aggression (the latter implies an internal motivation to aggress).

If aggression is what is learned, then we would expect that only a minority of both non-family and family offenders would aggress in both spheres (because it is less likely that aggression was modeled in multiple spheres). Further, there would be no reason to expect the proportion of pan-violent aggressors to be different between non-family offenders and family offenders. Why would non-family offenders be more likely than family offenders to learn to aggress in more than one sphere? Nevertheless, we observed that while only 13% of family offenders are pan-violent, a much larger proportion (nearly one-third) of non-family offenders are violent in both spheres.

It is possible that our non-family offenders had a much larger proportion of pan-violent primary models (e.g., many of their fathers may have been pan-violent). We have no way of assessing this possibility, given the current data. Another interpretation of this finding emphasizes the learning of restraint of aggression. According to this model, individual propensities toward violence might exist which are mediated by social learning of *controls* (i.e., learning where *not* to be violent, rather than where to be violent). If an individual has a propensity towards violent behavior, he may batter his wife; however, it requires the breaking of stronger social control to assault non-family members (Straus, 1976). Similarly, white-collar family offenders are very motivated to control their

extrafamilial violence because they stand to lose significant material gains; in contrast, the primarily blue-collar non-family offenders stand to lose little, if anything, by including their wives in their group of victims. Individual propensities towards violence appear to seldom be strong enough to break the extrafamilial taboo on violence; however, an individual with a strong enough propensity for violence to break this taboo should have little difficulty with breaking a weaker taboo, namely battering his wife (Straus, 1976). It certainly seems very likely that battering is more prevalent because it is more socially sanctioned (and thus less socially controlled) than extrafamilial violence. This model is able to account for the discrepant proportion of pan-violent individuals among non-family offenders versus family offenders.

There is no direct data in this study which can strongly support either interpretation. However, the interpretation which emphasizes the learning of *restraint* of violence is somewhat strengthened by the plethora of research which supports the existence of personal propensities towards violent behavior. The learning of social control implies the existence of varying degrees of individual tendencies to behave violently (i.e., it implies the need to control against such tendencies), and a large number of studies support the hypothesis that such personal tendencies exist.

Individual violent behavior might thus be the product of an interaction between personal tendencies toward violence and

personal degrees of learned social control. The less strongly the individual tends to behave violently, the less social control is necessary to maintain him as a nonviolent person. This interpretation of the data is supported by the observation that while many children are raised with poor social controls, only a minority exhibit severely antisocial behavior (Werner & Smith, 1982). Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) also point out that it seems very probable that both the psychiatric model and the social learning model of violent behavior are related to the general development of violent behavior.

Figure 1

Distribution of Victimization

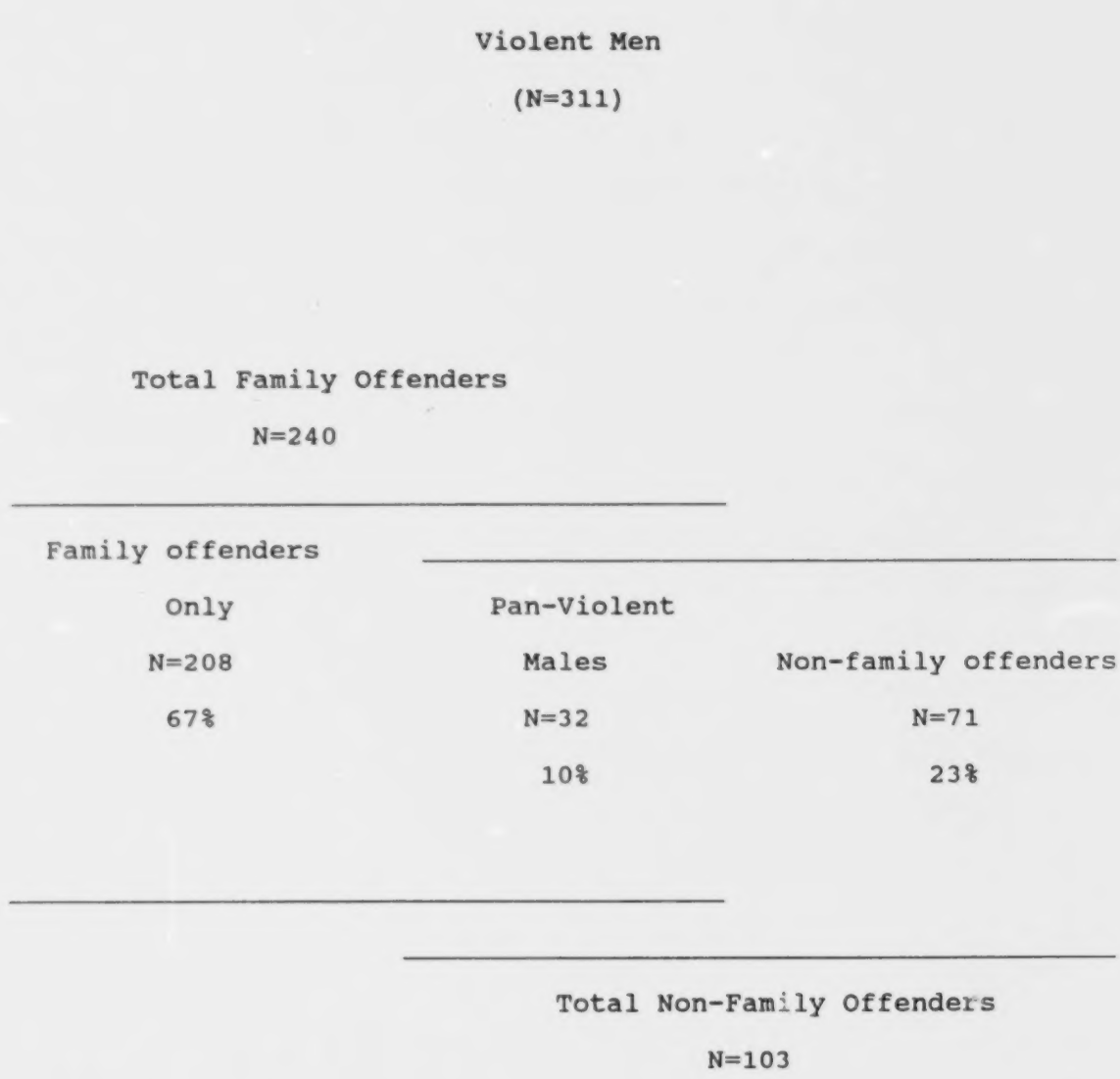

Table 1

Mean age of four groups

| Group | Number | Range of Ages | Mean Age* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family Offenders | 208 | 18-79 | 35.52 |
| Non-Family Offenders | 71 | 18-72 | 33.79 |
| Pan-Violent Men | 32 | 19-64 | 30.36 |
| Nonviolent Men | 1962 | 18-90 | 44.32 |

*Analysis of Variance: ($F(3, 2291) = 46.065$, $p<.000$)

Table 2

Race of the four groups

| | White Males | Non-White Males |
|---|---|---|
| Family Offenders | 63.6% | 35.5% * [1] |
| Non-Family Offenders | 63.3% | 34.2% |
| Pan-Violent Males | 48.5% | 51.5% |
| Nonviolent Males | 72.5% | 25.6% |

*Percentages may not add up to 100% because of missing data.

1. Chi square (3) = 23.16, p=.0007

Table 3

Blue- versus White-collar status of the four groups

| | White-Collar | Blue-Collar | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family Offenders | 48.4% | 51.6% | * |
| Non-Family Offenders | 23.1% | 76.9% | |
| Pan-Violent Males | 29.0% | 71.0% | |
| Nonviolent Males | 51.8% | 48.2% | |

* Chi square (3) = 30.67, p=.000

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